

Study on Beichuan Qiang Cultural Preservation and Development Strategies after the 5.12 Earthquake

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Foundation Item: Project of "Study on Qiang cultural preservation, cultural heritage and developmental strategies in post-disaster reconstruction of Beichuan" by local cultural resources preservation and research center of Sichuan Provincial Department of Education in 2009, No: 09DFWH008-1.

Abstract

Traditional Qiang culture is the sum of all civilizations created by Qiang people in the long historical development of the national minority, and is an important component of Chinese civilization. However, traditional Qiang culture suffered from the attack of the great 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake in the more and more vigorous process of industrialization and globalization nowadays. Based on difficulties and problems encountered in post-disaster reconstruction for cultural preservation and development, this article takes into an overall consideration of Qiang traditional cultural preservation and post-disaster reconstruction, protection of nonphysical cultural heritage and national cultural resources, tries to explore the principle, approach and method of traditional Qiang cultural preservation and development and attempts to present the current situation and analyze problems, and accordingly puts forward some countermeasures, measures and specific projects with the features of scientificity, maneuverability and development.

Keywords: Qiang culture, Nonphysical culture, Traditional cultural preservation, Folk customs, Continuity and development of national culture, Preservation system

Traditional Qiang culture is the sum of all civilizations created by Qiang people in the long historical development process, crystallization of Qiang life intelligence and embodiment of human achievements and an important component of Chinese civilization. Dynamic continuity of traditional Qiang culture and its benign development is not only the "harmonious yet different" historical experience of the Chinese nation and vivid embodiment of human wisdom, but also corresponds with the practical trend of the idea of "protecting cultural diversity" nowadays. However, traditional Qiang culture suffered from the attack of the great 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake in the more and more vigorous process of industrialization and globalization at present. When the natural habitation of Qiang people took a heavy toll, the protogenetic cultural habitat of Qiang was also seriously damaged, and the traditional Qiang culture was endangered with the possibility of extinction. National culture is the root and pulse of a nation, so reconstruction of the national culture of the disaster area and reconstruction of economy in the disaster area are of equal significance.

The 5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake caused an enormous disaster, which is not only a natural disaster, but also a cultural catastrophe. After this earthquake, the geologic topography was greatly changed in such major Qiang people inhabitations as Wenchuan in Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Li County, Mao County and Beichuan Qiang Autonomous County in Mianyang. As a result, quite a large number of Qiang people lost their homeland. According to the map of Chinese minority, more than 300,000 Qiang people lived across the fault caused in this earthquake, and lots of people were Qiang people that died in the disaster.

5.12 Wenchuan Earthquake exerted great influences upon both Qiang people and development of Qiang culture.

Leaders of the Communist Party of China and the state attached great importance to the disaster relief work and arrived at the first line of disaster relief several times, which greatly encouraged enthusiasm of people in the disaster area and the team of disaster relief. After emergency rescue of people in the relief work achieved a certain effect, the post-disaster reconstruction of Qiang culture was also put on the agenda. On May 22, 2008, the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said in his interview with Chinese and foreign journalists, "Beichuan is the only Qiang Autonomous County in China, so we have to protect the particular Qiang cultural heritage." On May 30, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission held "Symposium about Qiang cultural rescue and preservation in the earthquake stricken area of Sichuan" in Beijing, and announced the situation of loss of Qiang population and Qiang culture. On June 1, China Association for Promoting Democracy, China Society for the Study of Folk Literature and Art and The Academy of Chinese Culture co-hosted "the symposium of emergency protection of Qiang cultural heritage", and issued "Proposal for Emergency Protection of Qiang Cultural Heritage", setting up a survey and research organization of experts for emergency protection of Qiang cultural heritage including 23 members. On June 3, Sichuan Department of Culture issued "Initial Reconstruction Program of Qiang Cultural and Ecological Preservation Area". Preservation area would maintain the original Qiang construction style, folk customs and sacrifice etiquette and reflect the original ecological environment of Qiang culture and characteristics of the geologic structure. Preservation area was centered by Mao County and embraced Beichuan, Wenchuan, Li County, Pingwu and Songpan, etc. On June 8, the Decree of the State Council issued "Regulations on Post-disaster Recovery and Reconstruction of Wenchuan Earthquake", which includes 7 Articles concerning protection of cultural heritage, again indicating high concentration of the government on protection of cultural heritage. Ministry of Culture formulated "Program for Qiang Cultural Preservation in Earthquake Stricken Area", and set up coordination organizations for protection of Qiang cultural heritage together with State Cultural Relic Bureau and State Ethnic Affairs Commission. In order to push forward successful progress of all work, the following organizations were set up: Committee of experts, working group of preservation of cultural relics, working group of nonphysical cultural heritage preservation and trial plot of Qiang cultural and ecological protection. In October, the Ministry of Culture established trial plots of Qiang cultural and ecological protection and brought construction of trial plots of Qiang cultural and ecological protection into the overall plan of post-disaster recovery and reconstruction of Wenchuan Earthquake. On November 14, the Award Ceremony of the trial plot of Qiang cultural and ecological protection nominated by the Ministry of Culture was held in the Great Hall of the People. In view of post-disaster reconstruction, the proposal of cultural reconstruction had a milestone significance. The nation didn't put forward the issue of cultural reconstruction after the Tangshan Earthquake in 1976, while it mentioned in due time the issue of Qiang cultural reconstruction after Wenchuan Earthquake, which can be said to be an enormous progress. This was the first time that Chinese Government put forward cultural reconstruction after a natural disaster and Qiang ethnic minority also has become the first one in China that was reconstructed culturally after the disaster, which will have extremely important reference value for our reaction towards a natural disaster in the future.

1. The Wenchuan Earthquake caused great losses to Qiang culture.

1.1 The great earthquake seriously affected heritage of nonphysical Qiang culture.

Prior to the Wenchuan Earthquake, people had already sorted out almost 100 nonphysical Qiang cultural heritages, including 3 Sichuan provincial cultural heritages, respectively "Kouxianzi, Xujiawan Twelve Flower Lamp and Qiang Calendar Year", 3 Mianyang municipal cultural heritages of the legend of Dayu, Kouxianzi, Yangpi Duangongwu, etc, almost 20 Beichuan county-level cultural heritages, and furthermore, directories that had not been declared and about 40 cultural heritages that were being declared. Quite a large number of traditional Qiang cultural bearers were injured or died in the disaster. Qiang culture was inherited by Qiang seniors, especially the major bearer "shibi" for Qiang culture. However, the earthquake caused the originally small number of Qiang people to die who had a good knowledge in Qiang language and historical culture, which, without doubt, added to difficulty in protection of Qiang culture. All five formal working staff in the Qiang Culture Center in Beichuan Qiang Autonomous County died in the earthquake, and Xie Xingpeng, the well-known Expert in Qiang culture study in Beichuan, also died during the earthquake. The Dayu Memorial Hall and Dayu Research Institution in Qiang area also suffered from serious loss, and most of their researchers were injured or died in the earthquake. Wreck or severe injury of these rare talents would necessarily affect heritage of nonphysical Qiang culture. Besides, those skillful craftsmen who were able to inherit such folk traditional technology and traditional technique as Qiang embroidery, Qiang flute and Qiang blockhouse with distinct Qiang characteristics were also injured in this earthquake, and wreck or injury of these talents was a great loss to Qiang culture. Because a lot of Qiang culture bearers died in this earthquake, the dynamic development of Qiang culture was seriously obstructed. The subsistence right is the basic right of human being.

However, in face of the enormous natural disaster, the basic life of Qiang people is far below the level prior to the disaster. Thus, there is still a long way to go before its recovery, which will necessarily affect heritage and development of Qiang culture.

1.2 The earthquake caused loss and damage of a lot of Qiang material culture.

The great earthquake led to loss and damage of quite a lot of Qiang cultural relics and historical accounts of past events. For instance, Beichuan County with better preservation of Qiang culture suffered from an extermination of the entire county, some cultural venues collapsed in the earthquake, such as Qiang Museum in Beichuan, Culture Center, Library, Dayu Memorial Hall, Qiang Folklore Museum and Yu & Qiang Cultural Research Center, etc, and quite lots of cultural relics and Qiang cultural archival data, Dayu historical research data, cultural utensils representing Qiang folk culture were buried or seriously damaged. According to statistics of Mianyang Museum, all the 805 collections in Beichuan Qiang Folklore Museum were buried, including 2 national second grade cultural relics, 121 third grade cultural relics, almost 280 common cultural relics and about 400 Qiang folk cultural relics and material objects. The unique over 3-meter long bow in China used by ancient Qiang people for hunting was also buried and could not be found. There were more than 120 collections were sent to Mianyang Museum for collection after being authenticated in 2007 and narrowly escaped. In order to protect Qiang culture, Mianyang allocated a fund of 100,000 RMB for collection of Qiang cultural heritage and called on the extensive Qiang people to donate actively their collections. However, it never occurred to anyone that this collection action also resulted in collective damage of Qiang cultural relics, which had great influences upon Qiang cultural heritage. In addition, quite a large number of "non-heritage" image data were lost, which also become an irretrievable loss. Lots of data and research achievements stored in computers were also destroyed. Wenchuan Earthquake not only caused Qiang people to lose their homeland, but also made ancient culture seriously damaged that had been formed for hundreds of years and several well-known historical and cultural sites were also damaged to different extents in the earthquake. According to the survey, several places collapsed in the stone-laying ancient city wall in Yongpingbao of Beichuan County, with cracked and deformed city gate; lots of historical remains were destroyed in the birth place of Da Yu in the legend in Yuxuegou of Yuli Town; all the following were seriously damaged: cultural relics in the Neolithic Age of Yingpanshan in Beichuan County, inhabitation relics of Leshi Village, Keku plank road, Qingpomen riverdike relics, stone sarcophagus, masonry tomb, watchtower in Buwa Qiang Minority and shadowless tower, etc.; in Taopingqiang Village, three famous ancient watchtowers cracked and the top parts collapsed; houses in the largest Qiang village in Wenchuan County --- Luobo Village, were seriously damaged. All the above damages will exert enormous effects upon exhibition, research and protection of Qiang culture. In addition to the above things with significant historical and cultural value that have aroused extensive attention, lots of folk houses of Qiang Minority rich in national characteristics were also damaged to different extents, and the ecological environment which Qiang culture depended on was damaged too. Since a large majority of traditional Qiang villages were distributed in high mountains, many villages were also destructively damaged in the earthquake. The hostile environment is no longer suitable for residence of human being, so a lot of Qiang compatriots will be emigrated and settled down. In the job of emigration, if the subject status and voice control rights of Qiang culture can not be guaranteed in terms of cultural context to a certain extent and if a cultural and ecological environment can not be cultivated that is favorable for national cultural development, Qiang culture will lose its conditions of sustainable development to in a large part.

1.3 Historical and cultural relics in Qiang folk customs tourism regions were seriously damaged.

Taopingqiang Village in Li County has the beautiful reputation of "mysterious oriental old castle", and is the representative of Qiang villages. Such tourism activities as Qiang Village Travelling with folk customs began in 1996, which exerted great influences and brought considerable economic benefits, and which also greatly improved the life conditions of local Qiang villagers. However, during this earthquake, the bodies of three watchtowers were cracked. Of the three ancient watchtowers, "ears" of the top of two were destroyed, top gate arches of one collapsed that was patched in 2004 and some houses connected with the three ancient watchtowers were also damaged to different degrees. Luobo Village in Yanmen Town of Wenchuan County is well known to the world as it kept the yellow mud Qiang village that had been discovered to be the largest and oldest in the world. This village started its tourism development with the method of attracting investment from the year 2005, and it had just been in a start-up period. During this earthquake, one hundred percent of houses in the village collapsed, and this so-called "street in the cloud" had passed out of existence.

2. Suggestions and countermeasures for preservation and development of traditional Qiang culture

Considering the current situation of traditional Qiang cultural preservation and development and the situation of post-disaster cultural re-construction, although preservation and development of Qiang culture is faced up with lots of difficulties, in the mean time, it is also filled with hopes and opportunities, which is what requires most alertness and attention. Hence, on the basis of summarizing preservation and development of traditional Qiang culture, we also put forward some policy suggestions.

2.1 Principles in the preservation and development of Qiang culture

2.1.1 Principle of integrated protection that maintains and recovers the original appearance of cultural heritage and pays attention to the overall situation

There are the two modes of “Tangshan Mode” and “Lijiang Mode” in recovery and reconstruction modes in disaster-hit areas. The revamped “Tangshan Mode” is more suitable for urban and industrial development, while “Lijiang Mode” which “repairs the old as the old” is best for recovery and reconstruction of cultural heritage. On February 3, 1996, Lijiang suffered from a 7 magnitude earthquake, in which houses of lots of towns and villages collapsed, including the Old Town of Lijiang. However, in the work of reconstruction, local government paid special attention to recovery of the original appearance of folk houses with national characteristics, and “they repaired the old as the old and built the new as the old”. Thus, Lijiang Earthquake didn’t bring about unfavorable influences upon United Nations’ investigation in the declaration of “world cultural heritage”. The Old Town of Lijiang was awarded the title of “World Cultural Heritage” after the earthquake, which propelled rapid development of tourism in Lijiang.

Those severely afflicted areas in Wenchuan earthquake stricken area are also habitation of Qiang Minority, which have quite abundant human resources, polychrome national customs and characteristic national culture. For post-disaster reconstruction of homeland, we should not only pay attention to functions of solidness, security, shockproof and beauty, but should also emphasize national cultural characteristics and the integrity of the original appearance. When we recover and reconstruct villages, residential areas and some religious occasions where Qiang people reside, it is necessary to invite those anthropologists and ethnologists who are familiar with the national culture to take participation. According to the history and pre-earthquake conditions, they can recover, as it stands, the cultural characteristics of the minority inhabited area, the “temporal and spatial concept” passed down by the minority, pattern of the houses and emplacement of the internal heated kang of residential houses and shrine. All the above elements reflect the abundant traditional Qiang belief, world outlook, taboo, social gender and social control, etc. What is difficult is recovery and heritage of nonphysical cultural heritage. Since quite a large number of nonphysical culture successors who are familiar with Qiang technique died in the earthquake, lots of important Qiang cultural factors may, therefore, loss their “successors”, and are on the verge of extinction. In addition, quite a lot of Qiang people walked out of remote mountains after the earthquake and moved to urban areas or other areas for residence, so it is unavoidable that their cultural psychology has changed. Hence, it is important not to be assimilated by other mainstream dominant cultures in the process of recovery and reconstruction, and to try to protect carriers for heritage and continuity of Qiang culture. In the mean time, it is pressing to formulate some feasible measures to protect cultural successors and such nonphysical cultural heritage as technique and music, etc.

In the aspect of policy making and overall planning of cultural protection and post-disaster reconstruction, we should take the four Qiang Minority inhabitation counties of Wen, Mao, Li and Beichuan in the upper stream of Minjiang as the whole national cultural protection zone, pay attention to protection of their national characteristics, take full consideration of and show respect to local ecological features, national customs, social characteristics and cultural tradition and avoid changing local cultural ecology and living mode in post-disaster reconstruction, which may result in loss and damage of local national culture. Thus, it is a necessary principle we should pay attention to in the future to establish national level “Qiang culture protection zone”, to foster cultural and ecological environment that is favorable for national cultural development and to eliminate interference of local interests to offer integrated protection on traditional Qiang culture.

2.1.2 Principle of key development to highlight local characteristics

Only if we show respect towards difference, can we highlight the integrity. Thus, we should show respect towards internal diversity and local difference of Qiang culture in the process of cultural preservation and post-disaster reconstruction and refuse to carry out the cultural preservation and post-disaster reconstruction project in a sweeping approach. We should develop local cultural traditions according to different situations and highlight local representative cultural items, so as to present the overall rich connotation and diversified patterns of Qiang culture.

2.1.3 Principle to fully respect the power will of Qiang people and to maintain and recover the original appearance of cultural heritage

We should offer auxiliary external help on the basis of fully respecting the power will of Qiang people when we pay attention to participation of Qiang Minority in the process of cultural preservation and development. Thus, it is a necessary condition for Qiang culture to obtain sustainable development to guarantee the subject status of Qiang people in terms of cultural preservation.

2.1.4 Principle to cherish adaptability and innovation of cultural heritage and to add to sustainable vigor of cultural development

Culture itself is developed in a dynamic way, and culture itself has its own set of adaptability mechanism for social transition. Thus, national cultural preservation is not really to maintain and pursue unalterability of its culture, but to ensure that the adaptability mechanism of culture can operate effectively. Thus, in the process of cultural ecological preservation, Qiang residents and cultural successors ought to be encouraged to appropriately conduct cultural innovation, so as to maintain the normal metabolism of cultural tradition and the mechanism of self renewal.

2.2 Countermeasures and suggestions for traditional Qiang cultural preservation and development

2.2.1 To vigorously push forward construction of “Qiang cultural and ecological preservation area”

In order to build a cultural and ecological environment that is favorable for traditional Qiang cultural development, it is suggested that, in the process of specific implementation, the entire preservation and emphasis preservation are integrated to, on one hand, maintain the integrity of Qiang culture, and to, on the other hand, highlight diversity of Qiang culture. Some Qiang residential areas with prominent cultural characteristics are classified as key preservation areas and some Qiang villages are built as “national cultural and ecological village” that are better preserved in terms of traditional cultural heritage mechanism. We should integrate point with sphere and set up a set of comprehensive and stereo cultural preservation system.

2.2.2 To set up the preservation system of “nonphysical cultural heritage”

To carefully select those cultural items for key preservation that are most representative of Qiang cultural quintessence and corresponding preservation and development should also be conducted to those cultural items with local characteristics and rareness based on certain hierarchical system. In the preservation system, we should pay attention to highlighting regional characteristics and cultural features, then it is possible to supplement protection on cultural successors and cultural carriers in different cultural heritage. Considering the current preservation situation of traditional Qiang culture, it is recommended to recover the improve the four levels of directory system in cultural preservation of Qiang area and to lay a basic framework for preservation of nonphysical cultural heritage and cultural and ecological maintenance and recovery.

2.2.3 To conduct “social sustainable project” of cultural heritage in an overall way

To build a cultural preservation pattern with multiple forms and diverse approaches in villages, towns and urban communities, set up authentication system for representative successors based on the fourth-level nonphysical cultural heritage directory system in Qiang area and create good living and heritage conditions for representative successors. To conduct with a focus the project of cultivation of cultural successors in those Qiang villages that have sufficient conditions; to set up cultural heritage centers in some villages and towns, recover relevant cultural occasions, such as sacrificial altar, etc, and build a social environment of dynamic protection for cultural tradition; to set up a batch of cultural venues and national cultural education bases, such as cultural plaza, national museum and books and reference center, etc in first-level county towns and to form a “social sustainable project” of cultural heritage with integration of static preservation and dynamic development.

2.2.4 To strengthen in-depth overall research and rescue on Qiang culture

The focus is to promote protection and research projects with a combination of systematic classification and in-depth excavation and to strengthen vigor to collect such material and relevant material objects as nonphysical cultural heritage literature, sound image and pictures to provide reference evidence for the work of protection and academic research. In the mean while, to set up Qiang cultural data base and Qiang cultural digital museum and to employ digitalized storage means to give comprehensive, authentic and systematic recording and filing to material. Considering the realistic situation and development trend, study on protection and development of traditional Qiang culture should be concentrated on systematicness and dynamics, and disturbance of local interests should be avoided when local situation is respected. Thus, protection and research project should be comprehensive, and especially, those multidisciplinary and cross-regional research projects ought to be promoted with a focus in which local academics and outside experts cooperate with each other.

2.2.5 To intensify investment in and management of key projects of cultural development and to combine in an organic way traditional cultural protection and modern industrial development

To reinforce investment in protection and development of Qiang culture after the earthquake. In the mean time, to strengthen management and promotion of key projects and to transfer the disaster into opportunities of cultural protection. The rich traditional Qiang culture is a kind of cultural resource of great value with great potential for development, so in the process of its development, we should gradually strengthen establishment of mechanisms of talent cultivation, capital support and production operation, etc, and offer systematic support to research and development, manufacturing and marketing of cultural products to promote benign development of local cultural industry.

2.2.6 To conduct traditional Qiang cultural exhibition and dissemination in a systematic way and to build up ecological space that fits with protection and development of Qiang culture

To hold with enthusiasm rich national cultural activities, to promote recovery of such distinctive cultural activities as traditional Qiang festivals and etiquette customs and to make Qiang cultural tradition obtain a dynamic exhibition space and heritage environment in life of villages; to hold exhibition or performance activities of all sorts of Qiang cultural traditions through “Cultural Heritage Day” and “Nonphysical Cultural Heritage Festival”, to expand propaganda and popularization of protection and development of traditional Qiang culture, and to continuously enhance the self-consciousness of all citizens in cherishing traditional culture and participating in inheriting nonphysical cultural heritage; to pay attention to taking advantages of all sorts of media to strengthen propaganda of Qiang cultural protection and promote popularization of Qiang cultural knowledge.

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